The Greek myths

The power of love

By James Davidson
Foreword by Germaine Greer

No 2 in a series of 6

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The power of love

Danaë and her son
Narcissus and Echo
The Minotaur
Daedalus and Icarus

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Booklets in the Greek myths series:
1. Origins of the gods
2. The power of love
3. Thebes
4. Jason and the Argonauts
5. The Trojan war
6. The Odyssey

Foreword
Germaine Greer

Love, for the ancients, was the force that made happen everything that did happen. Every movement was prompted by desire. Nowadays when an apple falls to earth we call the force that sent it gravity, without registering the truth that gravity is just another name for attraction. The god of love is the oldest of the gods because he is the force without which the gods could not have come into being. The most vivid way to enact the elemental pull that makes earth take shape out of exploding gases is to dramatise it as sexual love between people, which generates life and defies death.

The power of love cannot be resisted. Even now we say that "love will find a way" and that "love laughs at locksmiths". In walling up his daughter, Acrisius defies the god of love, which is just as hopeless as trying to turn back the tide. Renaissance painters depicting the shower of gold pouring into Danaë's lap often show us the mischievous boy-god Eros pulling back the sheet so that the golden flood penetrates deep between Danaë's thighs. Danaë, like the earth itself, is impregnated by the power of rain – Zeus being the god of thunder – and she and her son are cast on the bosom of the sea to which all rain must tend, tugged by gravity. And from the sea she arises like the sea-born goddess of love herself.

Love can be disgusting, cruel and degrading, but even from the most humiliating liaisons, wonderful creatures may be born. Poseidon, the god of the sea, has succumbed to a terrible infatuation with the dread Medusa. When Zeus's love child Perseus strikes off her death-dealing head, the winged horse Pegasus, figure of sublime imagination, springs from the wound. Just so is poetry born from human mire and blood.

The transforming power that drives all change, that turns eggs into infants, and stinking volcanoes into fertile islands, comes to a dead halt in Narcissus. There are many ways of interpreting the Narcissus story, some more useful than others. In the oldest version, which is to be found on one of the papyri found at Oxyrynchus and in a later version by Pausanias, Narcissus sent one of his male suitors a sword, which he used to kill himself on the doorstep of Narcissus's

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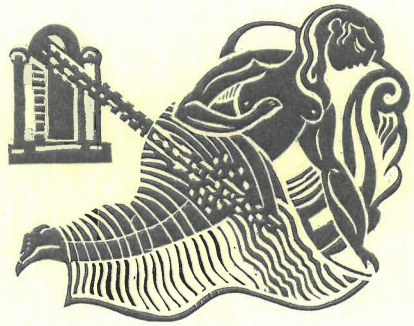
house. Narcissus is then punished not by Eros, but by Nemesis, the goddess of vengeance, who causes him to fall hopelessly in love with his own reflection, which he does not recognise, or in another version, with his twin sister. In the version you will read here, Narcissus has dared to deny the power of Eros, who takes revenge on him by firing two arrows, one into the breast of Echo and the other into Narcissus's heart.

In Ovid's version, 16-year-old Narcissus is simply unresponsive to the desire of others to enjoy his young body. In this he could be right or wrong. To be desired is not to experience desire. Immature people do not have a duty to respond to the sexual advances of other people, regardless of what the randy boy-god might decree. Ovid's Echo has been silenced by Juno (the Roman equivalent of the Greek Hera) because she intervened when Juno was trying to catch her husband out in adulterous affairs with her sister nymphs, holding her in conversation long enough for Jupiter (the Roman Zeus) to get away. Echo is punished for fostering sexual licence, Narcissus for refusing to allow it. The connection between the two myths, as far as we can tell, was first made by Ovid.

The Greek myths are central to European literature mainly because of Ovid's Metamorphoses, Latin versions which remained accessible through the long centuries when the study of Greek was neglected in western Europe. When Freud talks of narcissism he is using the Ovidian concept of a natural infatuation of youth with itself. The archaic version of the Narcissus story does not carry the same weight of suggestion about adolescent sexuality as Ovid's account. In the version you will read here, Narcissus is punished for impiety by the direct intervention of Eros. The omnipotence of love is compressed to a single mythic action, phallic enough in itself, of shooting an arrow.

In Ovid's version Narcissus simply wastes away; in other versions of the story he kills himself, either by stabbing himself or throwing himself into the pool. Ovid's version resembles more closely what we know about adolescence. One way of explaining anorexia is to see it as a pathological elaboration of narcissism and a deliberate rejection of sexual maturity. Freud saw masturbation as the sexual expression of narcissism; that excessive masturbation will make you waste away is, of course, a myth.

Danaë and her son



Eros, god of Love, is oldest of the Olympian gods. But despite his great age, Eros looks like a child, so some call him "son of Aphrodite". Although but a boy he wields a great power that draws men to men and gods to gods, and gods to men, and more.

Once there was a king, Acrisius, lord of wealthy Argos, who had a single child, a beautiful daughter named Danaë. Acrisius was so fond of Danaë that he locked her up in a chamber made of bronze, with no one but her old nanny for company, and swore that she would remain a virgin until her dying day. But Eros had other ideas. Zeus, the king of gods and men, saw Danaë in her chamber through the tiny window in the bronze roof that let the air and light in. He was smitten with love for her and laughed at the arrogance of Acrisius who thought he could keep so beautiful a secret to himself.

Danaë was woken in the early hours by a strange sound: plink-plink, plink-plonk. Rain was beginning to fall through the skylight. But this was no ordinary rain. Each tiny droplet was of purest gold, glittering in the rays of the first light as it fell. Now the drops turned into a downpour, making golden puddles on her bed and dripping noisily on to the floor. "They say I am beautiful, and now I am rich

as well, but what good will this dowry do me when my father is so jealous and will not allow a suitor near me?" She gathered the gold in her arms and in her lap, laughing at the joyful rain that poured through her fingers and between her knees. But as she did so she felt the presence of Zeus himself, for the shower of gold was he.

Nine months later Danaë gave birth to Perseus and together with her nanny she reared the boy for several years. One day Acrisius was walking across the palace courtyard when he heard the sound of childish laughter emanating from the bronze chamber. He ordered the guards to unseal it and found not two but three people inside. Acrisius could not contain his rage. He ordered the nanny's execution, then he had his carpenter make a chest. Into it he placed Danaë and Perseus. The chest was thrown into the sea, and Acrisius watched it float away. But Zeus, who sees everything, saw what Acrisius had done and made sure no harm would come to the precious cargo.

On the island of Seriphos there was a poor fisherman called Dictys who lived alone with no wife and no children. One day he set out his nets as usual, but when he tried to pull them in he found they were too heavy. He called out to the other fishermen to help him, and together they hauled in the catch. They were amazed at what they saw: it was no creature of the deep but a seamlessly wrought man-made chest. As he knelt down on the sand to force the lid, the chest opened of its own accord and out stepped Danaë with her son.

Good Dictys took them to his hovel of a home and together he spent many happy years with Danaë and Perseus as if they were his own family. Danaë was happy too. Never once did she miss the rich furnishings of her palace home, for Dictys had given her something more valuable: sunlight, air and vistas. To her lovely once-white cheeks the sea breeze added a rosy glow, making her lovelier still.

Now Seriphos was ruled by a covetous king: Polydectes. Eros made Polydectes fall in love with Danaë and he resolved to take her as a wife. Only Perseus stood in his way: "I am my mother's only male relative. Without my permission no man may marry her." "In that case provide her with a dowry," said Polydectes. "Perhaps a horse to pull the wedding-chariot." Perseus was enraged and shouted back at him, "By Zeus, I will indeed provide a dowry for you, Polydectes. I will provide the head of Medusa and turn you to stone." Polydectes smiled at the boy's reckless oath. "What you have sworn in the name

of Zeus, you must achieve. Go then and fetch the head of Medusa. But if perchance you don't return, I must presume you dead and will marry your mother anyway." He knew that Perseus would never get the head of Medusa, for she was a Gorgon with snakes for hair. Though mortal, her flesh would not yield to man-made sword, and she was protected by her two immortal sisters. Together they lived in a secret location in the furthest west, across the uncrossable expanses of ocean, on the borders of the kingdom of night. So Polydectes started to make plans for his wedding banquet.

Perseus regretted his reckless oath and went alone to the furthest promontory of Seriphos, unable to bear the reproachful glances of his weeping mother. Suddenly he felt a presence behind him. He turned and saw Athena herself. "So now you regret your reckless oath, fair Perseus. I hope you have learned your lesson. But Zeus remembers his love for your mother, when once naughty Eros pierced his heart with arrows of desire, so he has sent me to help you." She gave him a handsome sword with a cunning blade and a bright shield polished so perfectly that it looked like a mirror, works of Hephaestus himself.

"We will also need the help of Hermes," said Athena, "for he is the god of trickery and you could use a little of that. Already he has gone to Hades' halls to fetch the cap of Hades. This hat contains all the darkness of the underworld and whoever wears it becomes invisible to mortal and immortal alike." No sooner had she spoken than charming Hermes was there. In one hand he held the cap of the underworld, in the other a pair of winged sandals, and over his shoulder a tasselled bag. "With these winged sandals you will cross the ocean. With this cap of invisibility you will escape. And here is a bag in which to put the head of Medusa." Athena smiled. "Brother Hermes, you have thought of everything." "But sister you have forgotten one thing,"' said Hermes. "The Gorgons dwell in a secret place. Only the Graeae know the true location. They will never tell, for the Gorgons are their sisters. And how, moreover, will Perseus get close enough to Medusa to chop off her head? A single glance from her will turn a man to stone." "Come, sweet Hermes," said Athena, "surely the god of trickery has some tricks up his sleeve to extract the secret from the Graeae. And surely you know of some way to approach Medusa and survive." Hermes smiled: "Well, as a matter of fact I do. So here is my last gift to you, Perseus." He whispered something in Perseus's ear and then vanished as quickly as he had come.

Perseus strapped on the winged sandals and flew to the home of the Graeae. They are three grey ladies, as old as time, their skin wrinkled with deep furrows, their scalps covered with a few remaining strands of dank grey hair. They have but one eye between them. It was currently being worn by the middle one. "Fair maiden," said Perseus. "I wish to visit your sisters, the Gorgons. Could you give me the address?" The three hags smiled all together with three toothless grins. "Foolish hero," said the middle sister, "who thinks he can extract our secrets with such easy flattery, as if he were a suitor come to seek my hand in marriage." "Not you," said Perseus. "You are ugly. I was talking about your sister." "Let me see, eye-hogging hag," said the sister on the right, "Let me see my handsome suitor." So saying, she reached for the middle's sister's eye-socket. "No, sister. It is me, of course, he is talking of," screeched the one on the left. "Give me the eye." And she too reached for the eye. While the eye was passing from one to the other, none of the sisters could see. Quick as a flash Perseus grabbed it: "What a strange-looking ball with an iris and a pupil! I wonder how far I can throw it?"

The three Graeae began a pitiable wail, interrupted by muttered curses. "Cunning hero. Handsome hero. Give us back our eyeball," they wailed. "It is no child's plaything. Without it we are doomed to never-ending blindness." "So tell me what I need to know," said Perseus. Finally, the Graeae agreed, for they thought that even if they told Perseus where their Gorgon sisters were, they would be safe from harm. No man would ever reach them across the vast expanse of ocean. And if he did ever reach them, he would regret it.

Once he had got all the information he needed, Perseus returned the eye, and then was gone. He flew over the ocean for what seemed like days, as far as the region where the night meets the waves, a dark land full of rocky hollows. He followed the directions given him by the Graeae and arrived at the entrance to the cave of the Gorgons. There they were, the three of them asleep, more hideous by far than their old grey sisters, with leathery wings and snakes for hair. But now Perseus had a dilemma. The sisters looked identical. How could he tell which one was Medusa? If he plunged his sword into the wrong one, she would wake her sisters, and he would be doomed. He remembered what tricky Hermes had told him, and scanned the walls and the floor of the cave. One of the three was surrounded by tiny statues of mice, bats and insects, all utterly lifelike, once living creatures who had made the mistake of looking Medusa in the eye.

Reckless Perseus took a step towards her and reached for her snaky hair. But at the last minute he remembered the shield with the mirrored surface. He held it up at an angle, so he could see Medusa as she slept. And with his other hand he took the sharp-edged sword. As soon as she felt its cold blade upon her hideous neck, Medusa woke. Her eyes opened wide ready to freeze her attacker to stone. Perseus did not meet her gaze but looked away from her using only the reflection he saw in the mirrored shield. He smiled at her. She shrieked and woke her sisters: "A murderer is in our midst, my sisters! Kill him! Kill him! For he has devised a trick to avoid my freezing stare." Those were her last words. With one movement Perseus cut off her head and put it into his tasselled bag.

Now Medusa's vengeful sisters stirred from their sleep. As soon as they saw their beloved sister dead, they began to rage. Searching the cave for the murderous intruder, they found nothing. Thinking he had gone, they flew out of the cave in hot pursuit. When all was quiet once more, Perseus removed the cap of Hades that had made him invisible, and looked down at the hideous corpse. Suddenly he saw a tiny creature emerge from the Gorgon's neck, a little foal, white, with wings. Its first steps were unsteady on the rough floor of the cave, but then it stretched its wings and took to the air. It flew once around the cave and then out of the entrance, vanishing into the cloudless sky. "That is Pegasus," said Athena, who had been at Perseus's side all along. "He is the child of Medusa and Poseidon. For Poseidon, too, must yield to Eros, and Eros once made him fall in love with this hideous snake-haired monster and this beautiful white-winged horse was the result. Happy the hero who tames him. But we have no time for standing and chatting. Already the herald announces the wedding of your mother to Polydectes. Already the guests are arriving."

Perseus flew off with his winged sandals over the ocean and high above the Mediterranean sea. By the time Perseus arrived on Seriphos, the wedding banquet had already started. Outside the palace Dictys sat on the ground in despair. Inside, Polydectes turned to face his sad veiled bride. The guests began to shout congratulations. Then suddenly there was silence. Perseus appeared at the door. "Congratulations!" he said. All stared at him as if he were a ghost. "Keep on staring," said Perseus, "for when you see what I have brought as a dowry, you will never close your eyes again." With that he reached into his bag and brought out the head of Medusa. He held it up so all could see. And none of the guests could resist look-

ing. Only Danaë did not look. She heard Perseus's voice but did not lift her veil, ashamed for her gold-fathered son to see her.

With Medusa's head safely returned to its satchel, Perseus himself removed his mother's veil. And Danaë looked around the banqueting hall and could not believe what she saw. A room full of statues, all the guests open-mouthed, staring at the open door, and her bridegroom Polydectes, his eyebrows raised in permanent astonishment. Perseus removed Polydectes's golden crown and walked with his mother to where Dictys was waiting, along with all the people of Seriphos who had gathered outside. The crowd cheered. Then he placed Polydectes's crown on Dictys's head. "People of Seriphos, may I present to you Dictys, your new fisherman king." The crowd roared yet more loudly, for they knew that Dictys was a good man and one who would rule wisely.

Narcissus and Echo

So ends the tale of Perseus, born of a shower of gold when love-struck Zeus came to fair Danaë in her brazen cell, and of Polydectes whose love for Danaë ended in him being turned to stone by the son of that golden downpour.

Yet still in the city of Thespiae one young man was arrogant enough to defy Eros resolutely. His name was Narcissus and he was handsomest of mortal men. Everyone fell in love with him, male and female alike, but Narcissus rejected all of them, feeling no pity in his heart for those who are Love's victims. One of his admirers was so distraught he fell on his own sword and called on Eros to avenge him with his dying breath. Narcissus was unmoved. "Silly man," said Narcissus. "Clearly Eros is not a god but an affliction. I will never allow myself to be so humbled by this childish boy. Forever I will be immune to Love's arrows." He was talking to himself, walking alone through the mountains, as far from the city as could be, but Eros, god of love, heard every word. He took two arrows from his quiver. The first he shot at the nymph Echo. She had been a chatterbox once, but Hera had taken away her voice, so that she could only use other people's voices, repeating their words. And now suddenly she found herself head over heels in love with this visitor to her mountain haunts.

Proud Narcissus continued his reckless monologue: "How often have I discovered love letters, scrawled on the walls of Thespiae: 'O Narcissus, handsomest of youths. Will you be mine?'" Suddenly he heard a voice: "O Narcissus, handsomest of youths. Will you be mine?" The monologue was now a dialogue. Narcissus could see no one. He felt strangely drawn to that handsome voice, but thought he must be imagining things and continued unheedingly. "Or how often have I received a gift with a handwritten note saying, 'Fairest one. Meet me by the pool at midnight?'" Immediately he heard the same voice again, the voice of a young man, exactly like himself: "Fairest one. Meet me by the pool at midnight." "Who is here?" Immediately he heard the reply: "Here. Here. Here." Narcissus ran through the forest to where he thought the voice was coming from.

In the moonlight he saw a pool. "This must be the pool he was talking of," he thought, and knelt down beside it. There he saw a handsome youth. Now Eros closed the trap he had thus baited, shooting the other arrow into Narcissus's heart. Suddenly he felt the warm streams of love for the first time, love for this youth in his watery home. He leaned over to kiss him and found him not unresponsive, for the youth rose up from the depths with equal enthusiasm. But as their lips touched, the face of the youth became distorted in ripples. Narcissus reached into the pool trying to find him, but the more he groped for him, the less he saw of him. Only when he stopped trying did the youth's handsome face reappear. "Alas," said Narcissus. "Alas," said Echo. "I am in love with my own reflection." "Reflection," sighed Echo. Echo, though ignored now, could not pull herself away from Narcissus, and Narcissus could not pull himself away from himself. By the pool he wasted away. And when the Thespians found him, there was nothing left of him but a white flower. They called it narcissus in his memory and swore always to honour Eros, who had thus demonstrated his power. And Echo also wasted away, leaving nothing behind but her voice, which still to this day can be heard in the mountains.

Theseus and the Minotaur

Of all the works of Eros, none is more wonderful than the birth of the Minotaur. This is how it came about.

Every year Minos, king of Crete, ruler of a seaborne empire, sacrificed the finest of his bulls to Lord Poseidon in fulfilment of a vow. But one year he reneged on his promise, wishing to keep his finest bull for stud. Poseidon summoned Eros. "Little Eros, naughty child, Minos cheats me of my dues. He sacrifices to me the second-best and keeps his best bull for stud, expecting it will sire fine calves. So be it, let it sire a calf, but on Minos's own wife, Pasiphaë." And so, one day, as she was walking through the pastures, Pasiphaë felt a terrible love for the handsomest bull, the perverse work of Eros. She wished to consummate their relationship, and she satisfied her urge in secret with the help of Daedalus of Athens, Minos's maker of contraptions. Nine months later Minos attended the birth, waiting outside the delivery room for the first cry of his son. But instead of the strong wail of a man-child, he heard only the sound of mooing. He rushed inside and looked in horror at what Pasiphaë cradled in her arms. For his newborn child had a cow-like tail and little horns sprouted from his head, for his head was not the head of a boy but that of a bullock.

Minos was ashamed of this monster he thought he had fathered and ordered Daedalus to devise a great prison for his child. Daedalus built a giant maze which was called the Labyrinth. It had no gate and needed none; the Minotaur could never find his way out. Nor could any human. For when he grew to full bull-hood, Minos's son developed a taste for human sacrifices. To feed the Minotaur's need, Minos demanded human tribute from his subjects. Every year he sent a ship to Athens to fetch back seven men and seven maidens. Every year they would enter the Labyrinth, never to be seen again. But Eros felt pity for the Athenians, who always honoured him with sacrifices. So he made Poseidon fall in love with the mistress of Aegeus, Athens's king, cunningly devising a way to undo what he had done.

When his mistress bore him a son, Aegeus thought it was his own long-awaited child and welcomed him as his heir, but Poseidon knew that the boy, who was called Theseus, was his own. Theseus grew into a brave warrior and when Minos's ship arrived in Athens to collect its human tribute, he volunteered himself to meet the Minotaur and wrestle him to the ground or die. Now Poseidon regretted what he had done, fearing his own son would be killed by the monster he had helped create. He summoned Eros once more. "Many years ago I asked a favour of you, to punish oath-breaking Minos. But the punishment I devised for him now punishes its own deviser. For Theseus, my flesh and blood, is already sailing to Crete, to the Labyrinth, to his doom. Is there no way to use your power to help him, to undo what I have done?" Eros smiled. "Poseidon, you made me fill Pasiphaë with a perverse love, because you were too jealous of your prerogatives. Be careful in future what you wish of me. For Eros works in mysterious ways and often cheats expectation." And Poseidon saw that this god he had treated like a child was older and wiser than any of the Olympians.

The tribute ship from Athens had by now arrived in Cretan Knossus, its men and maidens offloaded. Minos was there to greet them, to make sure the Athenians had met their obligations and had not tried to cheat his monstrous son with fewer or inferior specimens. And Minos brought his daughter, clever Ariadne, down to the harbour with him. Eros made her fall in love with brave Theseus, and she did not wish to lose her loved one so soon after seeing him. Just as he was about to enter the Labyrinth, she gave him a sword and a ball of thread, given to her by Daedalus. Theseus took the sword with

gratitude but he looked with puzzlement at the ball of thread. He thanked Ariadne nevertheless and went to meet the Minotaur.

He found him after many hours of wandering with his companions; they had reached yet another of the Labyrinth's dead ends and turned to find the Minotaur facing them. The monster bellowed and pawed the ground with human toes, lowering his head and his long sharp horns. Theseus drew the sword. The Minotaur charged at a ferocious speed. Theseus, filled with fear, stood firm, holding the blade in front of him, his companions cowering behind, pressed against the maze's walls. Theseus closed his eyes. When he opened them, some time later, the first thing he saw were the Minotaur's horns a millimetre from his face, but the monster was dead now, impaled by his own strength and speed.

His companions congratulated Theseus, but Theseus was wondering how they would ever get out of there, for no one could escape the Labyrinth. He had saved his fellow Athenians from a horrible goring and condemned them to death by starvation instead. "Ah Ariadne," he said. "For this sword we will ever be grateful. But I will never get to thank you in person, for we will starve here in the Labyrinth, wandering its many wrong turns until hunger will let us wander no longer. If my safety was really your concern could you not have given me something more useful than a ball of thread?" He opened his left hand, which had been holding the ball, but found it had vanished to nothing but an end. He yanked it and was amazed to feel it yanked back. He pulled again. Again he felt it pulling back as if someone was tugging him. Suddenly he understood Ariadne's clever plan. She had given him the ball of thread but kept hold of one end, so it had unravelled as he went deeper into the Labyrinth. Now he could follow it and retrace his steps exactly the way he had come.

Some hours later he emerged from the Labyrinth with all his companions intact. Ariadne was waiting for him at the entrance. She hugged and kissed him. "My love, my love. I thought the thread would run out. How my heart leapt when I felt your pull. Quick, before my father finds out, let us sail away and you will make me queen of Athens." Theseus smiled and agreed to half of this, for love is not the same as gratitude and Ariadne's love for him was not requited.

When they stopped on the wooded island of Naxos that night, while Ariadne lay with her eyes shut, pretending to be asleep and waiting to be ravished, Theseus slipped away.

Ariadne dozed off and was woken by the sound of drums and bells and tiny chinking cymbals, and strange ululations. From the Naxian forest emerged an unusual procession of wild women and goat-legged pans and horse-tailed satyrs, all very jolly and perhaps a little tipsy, and finally a man with a long, full beard, crowned with vine leaves and ivy and holding a giant bat-eared goblet. He came over to her and put the goblet to her lips and kissed her. Ariadne smiled: "This is all most mysterious," she said. "You are beautiful," he said. "I am a god. Where is the mystery? Will you be my wife?" And Ariadne forgot about Theseus and becoming queen of Athens and married Dionysus and became a goddess instead.

Daedalus and Icarus

When Minos discovered that the Minotaur had been killed, the Athenians had escaped and his precious Ariadne had left with them, he was furious. He summoned Daedalus: "Daedalus, Athenian, once you came to me with Icarus your son. You took me by the knees in pitiful supplication and asked me for asylum. For you had killed Perdix, your nephew, pushing him off the Acropolis, envious of his accomplishments, when you saw him invent the tooth-edged saw, and the potter's wheel and compasses, and knew that he surpassed you in inventiveness. And Athena herself, your patron, felt pity for your apprentice and transformed him into a partridge. Even now he is scared of heights and shows how clever he is by flying low over scrub to avoid raptors and hunters.

"The Athenians sent you into exile for your jealous crime, but I took pity on you. Now Theseus, a prince of Athens, has killed my bull of a son and escaped from the Labyrinth which you devised so cleverly, you said, that neither my son nor any of the gifts I sent to him would ever be able to find a way out. It would not even need a gate, you said, so confident were you of your design. I believed you. So how do you explain what has happened?"

"Great Minos, offspring of Zeus and Europa, Theseus must have had help," said Daedalus. "For my Labyrinth is quite inescapable." "I drew the same conclusion," said Minos. "And who do you think helped him?" "Well, the princess Ariadne has gone missing, perhaps she..."' "Athenian, how dare you attempt to blame a blameless girl, who is not here to defend herself. She is no accomplice but a victim, kidnapped and probably ravished by now, by your Prince Theseus. For how could a young girl master the paths of the Labyrinth?" "Minos, great lord, it is a mystery to me also, for there is only one map, and it remains in my possession." "Let me solve the mystery for you," said Minos. "You helped him, for only you have access to the Labyrinth's plans. Doubtless you were feeling homesick and thought the son of the king of Athens would smooth your return from exile. Well, I am less ingenious than you, but I have built nevertheless a prison of my own devising, which I can assure you you will never get out of. It has no twists and turns, nor corridors, nor feints. It is but a single room, but it has a singular advantage: it sits at the top of a very tall tower; the views, I am told, are amazing."

Minos ordered his guards to take Daedalus away, and his son Icarus also, and he locked them up at the top of a tower as many-storeyed as the Labyrinth was many-acred. When they finally reached their prison at the top of the endless staircase, Daedalus was most dejected. The room was covered in filth for it had already become a favourite roost for pigeons; here he would be imprisoned until the end of his years with only his unintelligent son for company.

Bitter was the candlelit supper the prisoners enjoyed that night. For Minos gave them only gristle, fat and bones. "Don't worry, papa," said Icarus. "I will shoo off the pigeons and there is nothing I like more than gristle, fat and bones. It is not so bad. We have candles and the views really are amazing." "My darling idiot son," said Daedalus, brightening. "Now I see that you are a genius of a sort. But blow out the candles, save the bones, spit out the fat and don't shoo off the pigeons. For pigeons are our friends now." "Is 'idiot' a nice word?" asked Icarus. "It is, my son," said Daedalus and, for the first time in his life, he kissed him.

Now Icarus was assigned to collect all the wax from the candles, all the fat from the food, all the bones that Minos sent them, while Daedalus collected feathers and studied the pigeons they came from. And he built four frames of bones stuck together with collagen

glue. Then he covered them with fat and beeswax, and fitted them with feathers carefully arranged. Finally he strapped two of these great man-made wings on his shoulders and kitted out his son in an identical way. "Now Icarus," said Daedalus, "be careful. Follow the tracks of your father. Do not fly too close to the sun. Do not sink too low." "I am listening," said Icarus. "Please don't worry about me."

Together they jumped off Minos's high tower, and flew, more easily than they had ever imagined. "I am flying," said Icarus, "higher than Perdix the partridge ever did." "Remember your limitations," said Daedalus. But Icarus soared ever higher and got too close to the sun. The wax of his wings began to soften and his feathers began to fall out. Daedalus landed safely on the next island, and looked out for his son. He watched him soar and then plummet like a stone into the Aegean sea. His body was washed up on the shore, and as Daedalus mourned him, a partridge flew low over the scrubland making a noise that sounded like laughter.